

# CONSUMER ALERT

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Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection



## Protect Yourself from Locksmith Fraud

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MADISON – Wisconsin’s Department of Justice (DOJ) is warning Wisconsin residents about deceptive advertising practices from locksmith companies.

Phony locksmith ads are popping up statewide, with many placed by single companies using multiple names. These companies are often located outside of Wisconsin, but list phony local addresses and phone numbers to entice consumers who prefer to work with businesses in their area.

Online reviews are not trustworthy either, as the companies post fake consumer reviews praising their business and blasting their competitors.

Because these companies are often out of state, they enlist a contract locksmith to handle the job, leaving the consumer with no idea of the identity of the company or locksmith performing the service. If the work is shoddy or the customer is overcharged, the customer will not know who did the work. Consumers can also be grossly overcharged by scammers seeking to take advantage of their vulnerable situations.

Meanwhile, legitimate locksmiths have seen their own listings drowned in a sea of misleading locksmith ads, leading to a loss of business.

Consumers should be cautious in responding to locksmith ads. To avoid being deceived by scam locksmith businesses:

- make sure there is a valid street address for the business – a listing with no address (or a false address) can be a red flag
- if you call the number listed in an ad, ask for the name and location of the company, and the location of the person with whom you are speaking
- ask for the cost of the service in advance
- beware of Internet reviews that appear suspiciously positive (for example, a batch of glowing reviews posted in a short period of time)
- if a locksmith arrives in a vehicle that is not marked with the business name, ask the locksmith for identification and make sure you know the name of the entity with whom you are dealing.

If you believe you have been victimized by a scam locksmith operation, you can file a complaint with the Bureau of Consumer Protection. Download a complaint form or file a complaint online at <http://datcp.wi.gov>. You can also call the Consumer Protection Hotline at 1-800-422-7128.

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